

# NEWSRELEASE

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## Ceremony recognizes corrections employees killed in the line of duty

HELENA – Montana Department of Corrections director Mike Batista and Montana State Prison warden Leroy Kirkegard today laid a wreath at the law enforcement memorial on the capitol grounds in memory of four officers killed while working at the men's prison in Deer Lodge. The ceremony was held in conjunction with National Correctional Officers and Employees Week, which runs from May 4 to 10.

"Correctional officers truly are the unsung heroes of the criminal justice system," Batista said. "They bear the responsibility for one of the most difficult and dangerous jobs in public safety, and yet their efforts go largely unrecognized. This morning, I'm honored to recognize the officers who have given their lives while serving in Montana's prisons."

The names of four corrections employees are engraved in the stone memorial that honors officers killed in the line of duty:

- Deputy warden **John Robinson** – Robinson was stabbed to death by two inmates he had escorted to the warden's office on March 8, 1908.
- Officer **Frank L. Russell** – Russell, 58, died of an accidental gunshot wound as he carried two rifles and a bag containing ammunition and a .45 caliber Colt revolver to his duty station in a prison tower. As he dropped the bag, the Colt fired, hitting Russell in the head. Russell left his wife and two children.
- Deputy warden **Theodore Rothe** – Rothe was shot and died on Thursday, April 16, 1959, during a prison riot in which inmates took 16 guards hostage. The 35-hour riot ended when the Montana National Guard stormed the prison and regained control. Deputy warden Rothe, 40, was survived by his wife and two children.
- Correctional officer **Richard Wallace** – Wallace died on December 30, 1985, when a propane tank exploded in the MSP administration building that was under construction. Wallace left his wife and children.

"Montana's correctional officers are a vital component of public safety. By maintaining the care, custody and control of prison inmates, they serve the people of our state 24/7, 365 days a

year,” Warden Kirkegard said. “The dedication and commitment of this profession are reflected in those we honor today; those who gave their lives serving our communities.”

Lewis and Clark Sheriff Leo Dutton and representatives of the Montana Correctional Association also attended the ceremony.

National Correctional Employees Week was created in 1984 by then-President Ronald Reagan to acknowledge the work done by the men and women serving in the field of corrections.

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Photos and additional information about the officers killed are available at the Officer Down Memorial website: <http://www.odmp.org/>.